

Dangerous Stalemate in Putin's War with Ukraine

A Discussion with Dr. Stephen Bryen

by [Jerry Gordon](#) (April 2022)

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Who controls what in Ukraine?

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says talks between Kyiv and Moscow are confrontational, but moving forward. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov insists that the war is going according to plan, despite reports the Russian offensive in Ukraine has stalled.

DAY 28 - MARCH 23, 2022 | 05:00 GMT



Putin's invasion of Ukraine is now in its second month since its launch on February 24, 2022, with a formidable Russian force of 190,000 troops on [four fronts](#), backed by tanks, armored vehicles, missiles, aircraft, and a Black and Azov

Seas naval fleet. Putin [justified](#) his invasion “to demilitarize and de-Nazify” Ukraine because he feared that the western -oriented former USSR ‘republic” made Russia “unsafe, unable to develop and exist.” It was code for opposing NATO expansion on Russia’s borders.

The roseate forecast of his military and Intelligence advisers that it would be a repeat of his seizure of the Crimea peninsula in 2014 and Ukraine would be swiftly overrun and greeted by joyous liberated Russian-speaking Ukrainians has not been realized. Instead, Putin’s military advisers in frustration resorted to taking a leaf from his playbook for the first and second wars in Chechnya in 1994- 5 and 1999-2003. That witnessed heavy [bombardment](#) that flattened the Capital of Chechnya Grozny- meaning “terrible” in Russian- forcing the citizens to become virtual troglodytes entombed in their apartment block basements. The first Chechnya war ended after mothers of Russian soldiers [protested](#) over the sorrowful return of killed sons demanding an end to the carnage.

With the exception of a few minor cities in eastern and southern Ukraine, that Russia force has yet to [occupy](#) major cities, despite a brutal bombardment of the capitol of Kyiv, Karkiv on the border with Russia, missile attacks on the western Ukraine city of Lviv, and medieval siege of the Sea of Azov port of Mariupol in the country’s southeast. The conflict has internally [displaced](#) 10 million people, fully a quarter of Ukraine’s population of 44 million. More than 3.5 million Ukrainians, mostly women, children, and elderly men have [fled](#) as refugees to surrounding EU/NATO countries, with Poland accepting over 2 million. Ukrainian boys and men aged 18 to 60 were barred from fleeing, instead joining up local resistance and serving in Ukrainian army units. The US announced [acceptance](#) of up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees. Israel expects to [receive](#) 10,000 Ukrainian refugees and had [plans](#) for rescue of upwards of 200,000 Ukrainian Jews.

According to UK, Ukrainian intelligence and other sources the

much vaunted Russian force has lost an [estimated](#) 40,000 troops killed, injured, and captured by an unexpected fierce Ukrainian resistance force of [150,000](#) troops. Hundreds of Russian tanks and armored vehicles have been [destroyed](#) or surrendered to Ukrainian forces. The 2014 seizure of the Crimea peninsula and Russian -backed separatist war over breakaway provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk [resulted](#) in 13,000 Ukrainian deaths, 30,000 wounded in a static trench war reminiscent of the First World War. Since then the Ukrainian Army has received special forces [training](#) from US and NATO and been [equipped](#) with US Javelin anti-tank weapons, anti-aircraft Stinger ManPads, Turkish Bayraktar TB-2, and other drones in 21st Century Asymmetrical warfare.

The impact on Russian military capabilities was [evident](#) in the brief 2020 Azerbaijan-Armenia War over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh with Azerbaijan equipped with Turkish Bayraktar TB-2 drones and Israeli Harop loitering munitions , the latter blanking out radar and air defense controls.

Breakdown in the Russian military communication network [provided](#) valuable tactical intelligence to Ukraine military. Nightly raids by Ukrainian drone forces using Turkish Bayraktar TB-2s targeted tank forces and long lines of trucks. More than 15 Russian generals and senior army and naval commanders have been [killed](#) to date in the conflict. Soviet-era missiles in the possession of Ukrainians [destroyed](#) Russian naval vessels in the Sea of Azov port of Berdynask disrupting resupply of invading forces in Southern and Eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian forces have [captured](#) advanced mobile Krasukha-4 command module designed to interfere with air defense, drone and anti-air defense systems providing potential valuable technical intelligence for US, UK, and NATO forces.

The resolute and defiant resistance leadership of Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelensky championed Western creation of a no-fly zone, supply of Soviet-era Russian planes from eastern

European NATO members, receipt of S-300 anti-air defense and resupply of critical weapons and munitions. These requests were voiced in his virtual [speeches](#) to the US Congress, UK Parliament, French National Assembly, and Israel's Knesset. Nonetheless, Zelensky has offered to be "neutral" in third party sponsored negotiations with Putin's representatives. That meant not joining NATO at the risk of possible partition of Ukraine.

The continuing Russian onslaught in Ukraine roused the Biden Administration to attend an emergency NATO Summit [convened](#) by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Brussels. The President [accused](#) Putin of being "a war criminal" for his actions against civilians in Ukraine and warning about possible use of chemical and biological weapons. But he appeared to backtrack over remarks about a regime change in Russia that caused an uproar when he heedlessly [remarked](#): " "For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power."

That NATO summit was preceded by declarations of [sanctions](#) by the Biden Administration and the EU against Putin and top aides , calls for seizure of mega-yachts of his circle of oligarchs, close down of Russia's access the world financial systems via SWIFT, close down of the Russian gas pipelines Nord Stream 1 and 2 by Germany that had provided 40 per cent of the EU's energy requirements. As partial compensation for the reduction in EU gas needs from Russian sanctions, Biden offered to expand US production and delivery of LNG supplies in partial relief of EU requirements.

Germany [announced](#) an increase of its NATO required funding commitment to more than 100 billion Euros above the required 2 % of GDP benchmark. Ironic as former President Trump had criticized why NATO should continue receiving US support. Now even neutral Finland and Sweden had [evinced](#) a sudden interest in joining NATO maneuvers and possibly joining the Atlantic charter to bolster the so-called "blue wall" against Russian incursion.

Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett endeavored to ["mediate"](#) between Russia and Ukraine, given the deconfliction agreement between Jerusalem and Moscow allowing Israel freedom of the skies to attack Iranian targets in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Ukraine President Zelensky, who had aroused anger among Israeli Knesset members calling Russian invasion "the equivalent of the Nazi holocaust" of European Jews. He [asked](#) President Biden not to sanction Russian Jewish oligarch Roman Abramovich to enable his intervention with Putin. More than half of Israelis [polled](#) thought Bennett would fail, but should turn his attention to stopping a Russian brokered revised nuclear deal with Iran, sought by President Biden who might lift sanctions against the IRGC and delisting it as a terrorist organization.

As to why the Israelis were upset with Zelensky's reference to the Nazi holocaust, you only have to look at the history of Jews in Ukraine during the interwar period and Hitler's invasion during WWII.

During the brief 1920 war with Poland, Ukrainian nationalist forces, despite the warnings of Ukrainian leader Simon Petilura, [committed](#) pogroms killing 50,000 of the country's Jews. In the early period of World War Two Ukrainian nationalists sided with invading Nazi forces during which Nazi SS and order police Einsatzgruppen units [committed](#) "holocaust by bullets" of upwards of 1.5 million Jews. Among them were relatives of Ukraine's current President Zelensky. The memory of that was seared by the historic massacre of over 32,000 Jews at the ravine of Babi Yar near Kyiv in late September 1941. That became memorialized in the country's capital by the current Ukraine government, both of whose President and Prime Ministers Volodymyr's Zelensky and Groysman are Jewish. Ironically, the Babi Yar memorial was [bombed](#) by Russian forces during the current invasion.

After 30 plus days of non-stop conflict in Ukraine, Russian Federation Minister of Defense Sergei Shogiu, who had

disappeared for two weeks, suddenly [re-appeared](#). He announced the “end of the first phase of the “special military operations” to concentrate on defense of the self-declared “independent” republics of Donetsk and Luhansk Donetsk and Luhansk.

Putin, Shoigu and the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, Kirill , Patriarch of Moscow, and all Rus’ [espoused](#) the nationalist position that “historic” Kyven Rus was integral to the Russian empire, under the doctrine of “Rossiya mir” – Russia’s world. Ukraine’s majority “Greek Orthodox” Christians , who are affiliated with the Catholic Pope in Rome , have been the long term enemy of Russian Orthodox prelates evident in Czarist Russian actions in Ukraine during WWI.

An independent Ukraine declared in 1918 ended up in the USSR following the war with the Polish and Bolshevik forces under the [Treaty of Riga](#), March 1921.

Putin’s attempt at a dystopian shutdown of external and internal opposition communications about the war in Ukraine has proved leaky. Encrypted social media like [Telegram](#) -a Russian developed internet platform – and cell phone [messaging](#) from Russian conscripts to relatives sent personal witness that the war in Ukraine was taking its toll.

A major Putin adviser Anatoly Chubais [stepped down](#) and left Russia over the folly of this war. Arkady Dvorkovich , former Deputy Prime Minister, and head of the state -backed Skolkovo technology fund, [condemned the war](#) in Ukraine, one of the few insiders to publicly oppose Putin.

Putin, angered by the war’s failure to achieve an easy victory amid internal dissension. President Putin in an [outburst](#) on March 16th , called these critics “scum and traitors”.

This has given rise to speculation as to whether Putin might fulfill a dangerous threat to launch a possible nuclear,

chemical, or biological attack on a resurgent Ukraine or instead might ranking FSB advisers overthrow him. In retrospect , the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Accessions signed by Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Russia, the UK, and US forced the three former SSR s to give up their nuclear legacy in exchange for security guarantees from NATO allies and Russia. That may have lost a deterrent against Putin's invasion in 2022. Worse is still yet to come, if Iran secures a Russian brokered deal with the US and EU 3 to obtain its nuclear weapons capability challenging possible covert action by Israel.

Ominously, all [communications](#) during the conflict in Ukraine has broken down between the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army General Michael Milley, and his counterpart Russian Federation Defense Minister General Sergei Shoigu. The Russians are not returning calls.

Against this background, we held a discussion with Dr. Stephen Bryen, Undersecretary of Defense for Technology and Security during the Reagan Era, former President of Finmeccanica North America, Senior Fellow of the Center for Security Policy, and *Asia Times and Epoch Times* columnist. Among the issues discussed are NATO expansion angering Putin triggering the invasion , looming threat of China to Taiwan and absence of Biden Administration priority and flight from Middle East and abdication to Iran nuclear hegemonic aspirations.

Jerry Gordon: We're in the midst of a rather interesting episode, the Putin unprovoked intervention in Ukraine. What do you think is behind Putin's faltering Ukraine invasion that was supposed to be done in less than several days, what's going on there?

Stephen Bryen: Well, I don't know, I think the word unprovoked is a little bit inappropriate. It was provoked, not that he didn't have choices, he didn't have to do this, but, but it was provoked. It was the rising angst on the Russian side

regarding not just Ukraine, but the United States, NATO, and Russian worry about US bases going into Ukraine and setting up stations to launch missiles against Russia. They got into this terrible snit. I don't think he actually ever planned to have an invasion. This is my guess, but I think that, in fact, he put those 150,000 soldiers there to threaten action, unless some of the things he was asking for got done, which didn't get done at all. I think, it got worse and worse and there was a lot of baiting by the West.

Not just from Washington, which was terrible, because they kept calling him names and accusing him of all sorts of things. The British were terrible. NATO itself was terrible. Stoltenberg, who is the director general of NATO was just plain awful. He kicked out the Russian delegation from NATO, not long before the war started. The whole thing was that instead of trying to figure out a way to really talk to the Russians and to calm things down, we made it worse. We didn't satisfy the Russian on anything. Remember there was a Russian security proposal to the United States and another proposal to NATO. We gave them the back of the hand on that. Washington and NATO said, "No way, we're not going to talk about it. Not really." The Russians were insulted. They felt that they were being held up to ridicule by the West that didn't think they were serious people. So, what it came down was I think at that point he sent in the forces

Then, some people thought, I was one of them, that he would just go into the Donbas two republics that the Russians had just recognized, Luhansk and Donetsk, and stop there because he called it a peacekeeping mission. But he didn't of course, he went full blast from the northeast and from the southwest out of Crimean and the Black Sea. That is what you see now, if you look at the map. You will see that that most of the forces are up there in the northeast and also east of Odessa and southern Black Sea Coast with part of the force that came out of Crimea. This is what it appears to be where they seem to be

stalling, except for the attacks on Kyiv. I don't think they were prepared. They all thought this was something to get attention and would bring forth diplomatic results. The troops that he sent were not ready. Boy, did they show that they weren't just ready. They have taken a beating. They have managed to cause a lot of damage and hold certain cities and a certain amount of territory, but it has been very costly to the Russians.

Jerry Gordon: So that brings up a topic that I used to brief general officers as a very young US Army intelligence officer, six decades ago during the Cuban Missile Crisis, I'll never forget that. At the time we were briefing US commanders on Russian military capabilities. I remember the first slide I would put up said very simply, "Ivan does not stand 10 feet tall." You may remember that expression from the Cold War era. It had a lot to do with the fact that most of the Russian military gear, whether it was aircraft, tanks, artillery were deadlined for lack of spare parts or repairs. So, when this latest incursion into Ukraine comes this incursion or invasion, it was as if the Russian military had violated all of the known standards for getting a job done quickly: no air superiority, as no combined arms experience with this force that was sent in.

Stephen Bryen: Yes, especially between the infantry, and the rolling stock, the armor.

Jerry Gordon: Yes.

Stephen Bryen: But and it seems like they just haven't... That it's not organized. That's the best way to put it.

Jerry Gordon: Right. Quite frankly, the Russians had promoted the "reform of its military and weapons development." So as to communicate a message that it was amongst the first rank armies in the world. It doesn't look that way by anybody's standards after three weeks.

Stephen Bryen : I agree, it doesn't, plain and simple. Now they haven't always used all their top equipment in this operation. Much of it is fairly old. However, I think we keep forgetting that for at least 10 years and maybe closer to 15, they had no money. They had all this old Soviet era weaponry and equipment from before '91.

Jerry Gordon: Right.

Stephen Bryen: It was getting old and was not well-maintained. The Russians never have maintained stuff very well. They hadn't replaced most of it because they had no money, Some Russian equipment that came in, especially the air defense systems, are modern. The Pantsirs and the Buks. The tanks are older, for the most part, although some of them have been upgraded. So, it's a mixed bag, excluding the top equipment. I think a lot of that is because Russians didn't have that kind of money, that people keep overlooking that. Mr. Putin and the Russian military are very prideful people. And when they put on their annual Victory Parade in Moscow, they show you all the shiniest and best stuff and well turned out soldiers who look really elegant. But when you reach down deeper than that, it is not in very good shape that is what we've seen.

Jerry Gordon: Witness those conscripts that we've seen in videos crying about lacking food, warm clothing or driving trucks with cheap Chinese tires that shred all over the place.

Stephen Bryen: Yes.

Jerry Gordon: This looks like The Three Stooges masquerading.

Stephen Bryen: I don't know if it's quite that. First of all, they kept them sitting in the cold across the border for weeks with very poor provisioning, sleeping in tents in very cold weather. These guys were already worn out before they moved. Russian coordination efforts also are abysmal. Conscripts are conscripts. But we had a draft. Most of my family was in World War II in some capacity or another. Many of them went all the

way from North Africa, all the way up to France, Italy then Germany. Most of them volunteered. They were quickly trained and shipped out, but they didn't run away. Not at all, fought all the way through. In contrast, approximately 1000 Russian soldiers have already deserted, according to what I'm reading.

Jerry Gordon: The other problem, the Russian army has is, it doesn't have what was I think, created by General Marshall during World War I. That was unit command down at the squad and platoon levels with NCOs as basically unit commanders. That probably indicates the reason nearly over 16 Russian Generals and senior battle unit commanders have been killed.

Stephen Bryen: That they were the unit commanders.

Jerry Gordon: Right.

Stephen Bryen: Basically, they put them up front.

Jerry Gordon: That's correct.

Stephen Bryen: Yes, there have been 16 senior officers killed of which seven were generals.

Jerry Gordon: Yes.

Stephen Bryen: That is big dent in Russian combat leadership.

Jerry Gordon: Yes, it is. The Ukrainians on the other hand, seem to have demonstrated a great deal of resilience and artful use of what you and I would call asymmetrical weapons. I'm referring to things like the javelins, the Stinger MANPADS and other examples.

Stephen Bryen: But keep in mind that a lot of effort was made from about 2015 until before the war, just before the war, of Special Forces training provided by the US, the British, other NATO countries, and by the Israelis.

Jerry Gordon: That's correct.

Stephen Bryen: So, they were trained to deal with an asymmetric situation because the Russian army is huge. But by comparison the Ukrainian army is relatively small, and equipped by the West, in addition to what Russian equipment they had. However, it was the supply of these unique weapons that can destroy tanks and the drones, the latter that they received from Turkey, which can destroy almost anything from the air. It is interesting because now the Russians have shot down quite a few of the drones but they have been replenished. The use of drones represents a whole new type of warfare that is changing the battlefield, because a drone can penetrate deep, reaching the supply lines, stockpiles, petrol dumps and take them out, and that is something new. You used to have to send a fighter plane. Now the Russians have had good air defense systems.

But now they send these little drones, although the wingspan of the Bayraktar, the Turkish drone, is longer than the wingspan of the F16. It flies low and is made of composites, has a small engine, and it is hard to notice on radar. By the time you pick it up, it is already shooting a rocket at you. You may get it, but it may get you, first. In the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war the Israeli drones particularly the loitering munitions like the Harop plus the Bayraktar were tremendously successful against the Armenian – backed forces. In fact, they were Armenian forces, but we'll give them the benefit of the doubt. The Israel and Turkish drones were very effective. One of the features of the Israeli Harop loitering munitions and the Harop is an anti-radiation weapon, which goes after radars, communications hubs, antennas of all kinds and blows them up.

Jerry Gordon: Do the Ukrainians have access to that?

Stephen Bryen; Well, who knows? If they do, they're not going to tell you.

Jerry Gordon: No way is Israel going to say anything about it.

Stephen Bryen: Israel says they're neutral. They have nothing to do with it.

Jerry Gordon: Yes.

Stephen Bryen: Look, there are a lot of things that go on those countries don't talk about because they won't get anywhere if they do, right?

Jerry Gordon: President Zelensky held a virtual speech to a standing ovation in Congress. He talked about the necessity of securing weapons to deal with the missiles and high altitude bombers. The message was, closing the skies over the Ukraine. So...

Stephen Bryen: Very hard to do.

Jerry Gordon: That's the point. So, the question is, what is he really requesting from the US and its NATO partners?

Stephen Bryen: He wants the US and its partners to fly their airplanes over his airspace and shoot down the Russian planes.

Jerry Gordon: Well, that's not going to happen.

Stephen Bryen: I don't think so. At least not right now. First of all, let's go back to the beginning where people like Biden, Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister of UK, Scholz the new German Chancellor, and Macron, the President of France, all said, "We are not going to send any NATO forces into Ukraine, period zero." Because Ukraine is not a NATO member," they said. That never prevented them from doing it elsewhere, like, Afghanistan and the Balkans and other places. The reason is that the Russians have made it clear particularly to the Eastern European countries, that if you do that, you are part of the war, we're going to attack you. I think that that's a fairly cogent threat. I understand Zelensky's desire and need, and it's all very great. So, what we are doing instead is providing him more Stinger missiles, which are very effective,

but only when the threat is near, 3-4,000 feet away. However, if the aircraft are beyond visual range, it is of no use, whatsoever. Then you need a bigger air defense system that's functional, or you need airplanes, or both.

This is simply not going to happen because even if we wanted to tomorrow morning, it would take weeks and weeks, if at all, to get the equipment to the Ukrainians and then train them to use it. Or alternatively, we'd have to do it ourselves and then you have your war in Europe which present a different problem. Put it simply and bluntly. Europe does not want a war. The US doesn't want a war. Biden certainly is not the sort of President, as far as I can understand him, he's not the sort of president that wants to get into a conflict.

Jerry Gordon: Before we began this discussion, there was an announcement that Slovakia was willing to provide Ukraine with its S-300s systems.

Stephen Bryen: Yes, I saw that too. I can't evaluate that. S-300 is just another air defense system. If you provide them a Stinger, you can provide them S-300s, but it's a big system. It has a lot of components to it, radars, command centers, launchers. All of these are mobile so these elements can be driven on roadways. I suppose if they are brought in, the Russians will knock them out. They've already proven that when they hit the Lviv training center, which was essentially a NATO outpost.

Jerry Gordon: Having done that, what does that say about Russian's "long-range missile" capabilities?

Stephen Bryen: They work. This missile attack used stand-off rockets or missiles that are launched from an airplane of perhaps a few hundred miles. I don't think that the launch was that far away, as Belarus is right there. They could literally shoot it from Belarus and hit those targets without much difficulty, and they did. They used them a great deal in

Syria. Mostly relying on the Kalibr cruise missile which is not supersonic. You could hit it with an air defense system if you happened to have one, but it seemed like there wasn't any around that base. There's no information that came out that said anybody fired at it. I forget how many missiles went in there, but quite a lot. A large number of persons were killed and injured.

Jerry Gordon: The United States and others hit Russia with a vast array of economic sanctions. Regardless of the immediate impact on the Russians economically, what impact did they have on Russia's logistical resupply for the campaign in the Ukraine?

Stephen Bryen: It wouldn't have any immediate impact because the process of making weapons is slow, and it takes years to produce them. I don't think it would have an immediate impact. The bigger impact is on the civilian population of Russia who are finding the shelves less full. Things are disappearing. Can't get a McDonald's burger anymore. You can't get an ATM to work because they're all not working. The Ruble's value has fallen through the floor. They have a lot of economic issues to face and try to find workarounds to live with these sanctions. They want to get this thing over with. That's my guess, although, there was a set-back today.

I don't know what's going on at the moment. It looked for a few days, they were beginning to really talk seriously about some sort of deal. I believe at the working level. I won't call them conclusions, but there was some common ground. Then Putin got on the television, and he was really angry at everyone. He's slowed down or stopped... I don't know if he stopped the process, but he pulled them away. Foreign Minister Lavrov was on his way to China, when he was almost in the Far East by the time he got a call, he had to return to Moscow. The plane turned around. I don't know if Putin's really in control or not in control. However, he's behaving like a cornered animal.

Jerry Gordon: Well, there is a famous remark that has been recorded about, as a kid growing up, poor as the church mouse in Leningrad , now reverted to being called St. Petersburg. he noticed what happened when a rat that entered the apartment when it was cornered. It pushed back.

Stephen Bryen: I think he understands that.

Jerry Gordon: Yes, he understands that only too well.

Stephen Bryen: If he thinks he was going to see more of a military result, it doesn't look like it right now. But he doesn't want to lose any more military options. There comes a point when you reach with this, where you lose so many troops and people get disgusted. Russians don't like to lose soldiers. While they're not bringing most of them back, families are finding out, because they can't find their sons. Then they ask their friends, "Do you know where Vladimir is?" "Oh, didn't you hear?" "What do you mean, didn't you hear?" "Oh, didn't you hear he was blown up by an anti-tank weapon yesterday." The cell phones work, so they can sit in Ukraine call their families in Moscow or anywhere else in Russia, Siberia. That is the other interesting thing, these troops have been pulled in from all over Russia. Because that means that the Russian defenses are pretty thin.

Jerry Gordon: What in your view have been the failings of both the Biden administration and NATO response to Putin's incursion in Ukraine?

Stephen Bryen: First of all, NATO and Biden incited and inflamed the situation. They didn't need to do that. Especially, you don't do that if you're not planning to do anything about it. The Russians thought, when they said, "Well, we're not going to provide any military, we're not going to move our military and we're going to stay out of this. It's not our war." The Russians said, "Oh look here, we have a free pass. We don't trust NATO. We'll keep a close eye

on them, but if there were any NATO forces moving toward Ukraine, we're not going to worry about it." The US has made a little bit of reinforcement in Poland, that's about it. There's a bigger question about NATO and whether it really would even defend, not just Ukraine, but whether it would defend its own new members.

Jerry Gordon: The Baltic states, for example.

Stephen Bryen: Right. Poland and The Baltics, NATO is more likely to support. But when you go south, when you get to Romania or Bulgaria, Slovakia. I wouldn't hold my breath. I think that it's a real problem, because NATO wasn't built to defend those countries. NATO was built to defend Western Europe, plain and simple. And the bases are all in Western Europe. To the extent there is any real stuff it is in Western Europe, and in Germany, especially, Italy and the UK, but not in France. France doesn't want us. It's not in the other places, except we have some brigades in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Some brigades. Those Baltic States are right up against Russia, few miles from St. Petersburg, formerly Leningrad. It's very close. The Baltic states could be knocked off and, unlike, Ukraine, which was well-armed, they're not. The Ukrainians have tanks, aircraft, and air defenses. You go up there into the Baltic states, they have almost nothing. Yes, we put some troops and tanks there.

The problem is that NATO does not have the forces to really defend these new members, and then there is really a political question of whether it would in any case. I'm not saying that to be difficult or to throw rocks at NATO. Not at all. However, I think NATO lost its senses, lost its mind when it started this expansion without having to do the rest. You have to make it solid enough so we can really offer defense and security to its members. I don't think they ever achieved that, not even close. A lot of NATO members didn't want to pay for anything anyway, like the Germans.

Jerry Gordon: Yes, I noticed the Germans vaulted their defense obligations after this Ukraine incursion to 100 billion Euros. So, I understand it.

Stephen Bryen: Well, they were talking about it. But they haven't gotten it through the Bundestag yet. They said they were they're going to buy F-35 stealth fighters, but they haven't gotten that approved either. I think after this dies down, they may change their mind, but they're down to maybe 200 tanks for the whole of Germany. Many of which don't work, because they're out of spare parts and they haven't kept them up. It's a big mess. Trump was completely right about that, and everybody said, "You're ruining the alliance. You're doing... Why are you saying these things?" But he wasn't saying quite the right thing, he should have said, "We can't defend anyone unless we have enough capability, and the member states have to put the capability in to make it work. That takes money. and the money isn't there." I think NATO may fade away naturally. At the end of the day, it depends on the United States.

Jerry Gordon: And the United States is unwilling to provide the troops for that episode.

Stephen Bryen: Very few.

Jerry Gordon: Right.

Stephen Bryen: We have reinforced our posture in Germany, Poland, and Latvia. We have done a little bit. But 50,000 troops are not going to stand up to the Russian Army. As bad as it is; it's not very good.

Jerry Gordon: Wow. Let us turn to another situation that is problematic, and that is...

Stephen Bryen: Can I put in one other point, before we move on?

Jerry Gordon: Sure.

Stephen Bryen: Russia is not our main problem of the world. Far from it. Our main problem is China. China is a growing power, and unlike Russia, which has a lot of old equipment, China has a lot of new equipment, and from what we understand, it's sophisticated. They have a navy that's bigger than ours. They have air power in the Pacific that is much greater than what we have in the Pacific. And they have a huge land army. They have tremendous power. Plus, they have so many missiles you can't even count them. We don't have many, hardly. We should be concentrating on the Chinese problem before it's too late.

Jerry Gordon: You say Chinese problem; doesn't that go back to our series of discussions about what to do to "protect" Taiwan?

Stephen Bryen: Yes, it does. It's Taiwan, it's Japan, it's Korea too. And some of the other countries in the region. The Philippines, for example, which could find themselves on the wrong end of the US alliance. Or Vietnam could find themselves on the wrong end of the stick. We should be working on those relationships and building up strength that way, so that the Chinese understand that we have a serious capability. Right now, I don't think they think so.

Jerry Gordon: India is the other problem area as it has procured a fairly significant amount of its weaponry purchased from Russia.

Stephen Bryen: About 75%.

Jerry Gordon: Yes, the balance may be French and Israeli

Jerry Gordon: Well, India has a lot of Israeli systems like the Barak missile system, and others. Then there are a lot of upgrades and equipment that are using Israeli stuff. The French just sold them Rafale fighter planes. There are also

German systems, but very little US. The US has been trying to get into the market there but hasn't been terribly successful yet. As the US systems are very expensive.

Jerry Gordon: What I was referring to was India abstentions from any anti-Russian resolutions at the UN?

Stephen Bryen: So, did Israel. Although I think the last one the Israelis did vote for.

Jerry Gordon: So why is Israel taking such a nuanced position in terms of the Russia-Ukraine war?

Stephen Bryen: Have you looked over the Golan heights on the other side?

Jerry Gordon: Yes.

Stephen Bryen: There's a threat there, isn't there?

Jerry Gordon: Yes, Iran and Hezbollah.

Stephen Bryen: The Russians have let them tamp down that threat, but they haven't eliminated it by any means. However, they have been allowed to run operations. When the Russians don't shoot at them, and they don't put their airplanes in the air against them because the Russians have a big air base, Hmeymim there, and a large naval base at Tartus. The truth is that the Israelis have lived with the Syrians for a long time. So, they don't want that to turn bad, because the Israeli cities now are in missile range. Haifa, for example, very much so. I think they're working on that. I have to say that they have a good relationship with the Russians. People forget that Israel now has a very large Russian Jewish population. Maybe what, a million and a half or so?

Jerry Gordon: Yes. And by the way, that's growing, if they allow it in several hundred thousand Ukrainians.

Stephen Bryen: Exactly. There are all these factors and add to

that Israeli product are popular in Russia. I think that it's difficult for Israel to take a hostile position. Anyway, what would it gain? The Jews wouldn't get out of Ukraine because the Russians would stop them. Because there's all these things that are in play.

Jerry Gordon: So, let's deal with a couple of events that have occurred in the last several days in the Middle East that impacts Israel and Iran and probably the US. It is whether we're going to have closure on a revamped nuclear agreement, which is very concerning, to be quite honest.

Stephen Bryen: Well, it should be concerning. The real issue is not the nuclear agreement, as much as Biden wants it, and will get it, By the way, it will be awful, for sure. The real issue is that these geniuses in Washington, and I use that term emotionally, they think that the big power in the Middle East is Iran. The US traditional partners, Saudis, the UAE, Israel, Jordan are no longer relevant. What they want to do is have a political alliance with Iran. They are willing to let Iran run over Iraq and Lebanon and run over Yemen in exchange for this alliance. It's an old idea because many strategists, using that term advisedly said, "Well, you know, Iran is a big country with lots of resources, and they're really clever and capable and they can do all these things, and so why shouldn't we be friends with them?" We were for a long time with the Shah, sort of friends, and sometimes we didn't like him, and sometimes we did. When they took our oil away, we weren't so happy with him, but that was what it was.

When Iran became ruled by the Mullahs, and it became anti-American, hostile, we were shut out. Now these people want back in, and they also see it as a big market. So do the Russians, by the way. That's where they've been going. The nuclear deal is sort of the grease to make it happen. We give them all the impounded money, take the Revolutionary Guards off the terrorism list, which is another part of this, which they will do. I think Congress will let them because Congress

is worthless. It talks and doesn't do anything to stop it. It could block it, but it won't. We could demand that this deal be a treaty, but it won't. I mean, there are a lot of things that I would criticize, and that includes the Republicans. They are just as worthless. They won't fight for what matters. So, they are going to let the administration do this, and it's going to be a disaster politically and militarily and every other way. It's very bad. But that's what's going on.

Jerry Gordon: Are we giving back another 100 plus billion dollars as part of this deal?

Stephen Bryen: Well, we take off the sanctions, so we have to then free up all the frozen accounts.

Jerry Gordon: That's correct.

Stephen Bryen: I don't know how much money that is, but it's probably a lot.

Jerry Gordon: Estimated at upwards of \$131 billion dollars.

Stephen Bryen: Yes, that's a lot of money.

Jerry Gordon: Yes, that's a lot of money that could be used by the IRGC to create mayhem in that area.

Stephen Bryen: Oh, it will be, I mean and there's no doubt of where it's going to go. They're not going to use it to provide social welfare.

Jerry Gordon: No, not at all. So, what does that say about what Israel's options are?

Stephen Bryen: Well, they don't have very many options. Because part of it's this nuclear impasse with Iran, Israel has said that they will do it themselves if they have to. Now, whether they mean it or not, that is another story, but at least they're planning on that. The other part is the wider arc of the Middle East, which is going to turn into an

Iranian-controlled map. That is dangerous, for Israel. It's more dangerous than the nuclear deal

Jerry Gordon: So, you're saying that is the danger of the rising alliance that you talked about?

Stephen Bryen: Attempt at an alliance. Because I think we won't get an alliance, I think what we'll get is the back of their hand. I mean, it will be a complete disaster from the US point of view, but it leaves our allies hanging by threads. It is very dangerous, not just for Israel, but for Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and the Emirates. They will be in deep kimchi.

Jerry Gordon: In that case, is Israel the so-called strong horse in the Middle East?

Stephen Bryen: Well, yes, it's the strong horse in the pro-Western part of the Middle East. That's why the Gulf states in particular, but not only, have turned to Israel for help. Because Israel's pretty advanced militarily, and they're not so good militarily. They have a lot of good equipment, but they don't know how to use it right. They need training, they need command and control, which is proper, and learn how to hit targets instead of hitting civilians. . They need to improve rapidly, and I think the Israelis could help them with that. And I'm sure they will.

Jerry Gordon: So, there are a couple of attacks that we had seen in the press recently, Iranian missile attack, in Erbil, all while waving a Scimitar saying that it was attacking those crazy Zionists, who allegedly had a secret training operation there. However, that was a US facility, wasn't it?

Stephen Bryen: Well, we're not completely sure because the missiles didn't hit any known targets, The Iranians said they fired them from their territory, so it took full credit for this. The Iraqis of course did nothing about it. Zero. The US did nothing about it. Zero. Which is a disgrace by the way. They fired these Fateh-110 missiles, which are not real

accurate. The original thought was it was aimed at the US consulate in Erbil. One of the rockets actually landed in the courtyard of the consulate but didn't do any damage to the building. If there was an Israeli something there, and if they fired at it, and I'm sure they didn't hit it. Well, if that were their purpose, then why would they pick that target when they could pick lots of other ones shooting from Syria? So, it doesn't all add up and at the risk of the fact that it was from Iran, I happen to think this was a challenge to the United States.

Jerry Gordon: I think you're not the only observer who has made that remark.

Stephen Bryen: Yes, I think that's right. I think the reason for it was, either you'd give us the deal we want, and stop backing these people in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel and all the rest. You give us a deal we want, and you restore Jerusalem to the faith. And while you're at it, you can also restore the holy places in Saudi Arabia. Okay. And when you do all these things, then maybe we will talk to you. That was what it was about. Well, no one has turned up any evidence of any Israeli anything in Erbil, I'm not sure there might be, but it just doesn't make any sense that they would target that.

Jerry Gordon: The other news item was apparently a delayed revelation that there was an Israeli drone attack on an Iranian drone base.

Stephen Bryen: Yes, I heard about that one. They took it out. Well, the Israelis have been hit by a number of drones from Hezbollah coming into Israel, which means they're Iranian, and they got tired of it.

Jerry Gordon: So, they wiped it out?

Stephen Bryen: Well, they wiped out at least one of the bases and said, "You want to play this game, we can play it too."

That's called making facts.

Jerry Gordon: On the ground.

Stephen Bryen: Yes. That makes the logical good sense. It lines up with what we know was going on, so I'm assuming it's a true story, I have no way to validate or verify it.

Jerry Gordon: What about the allegations about a failed Mossad operation to shut down the Fordow nuclear enrichment complex? That is pretty heavily fortified.

Stephen Bryen: Well, the last time they did it, that you know about. There was a guy who brought in some equipment that was booby trapped and then it blew up. That's more of their style. And that was before there was a very big complex. I don't think this sort of operation they're describing occurred. The Iranians have a habit of putting out these false stories. I think it's a false story. I don't think it's true. It's like the famous nuclear scientist who was supposed to have been killed by this robotic gun on a truck that disappeared, that was never found, and who got shot in the heart when the part of him that was sticking up was his head. He was assassinated. But not there.

Jerry Gordon: The final question for you, Steve, is what's your prognosis about when and under what circumstances the Putin incursion in Ukraine will end?

Stephen Bryen: I thought it was going to end fairly soon, because I thought that we were moving toward some deal, and then as I said today, Putin went in the wrong direction for some reason, something got him enraged. That's the right word, I think. I don't know if it was his own people or something that Biden said. I think it might have been what Biden said. Biden called him "a war criminal."

Jerry Gordon: Yes, he was asked that at a press conference a day before...

Stephen Bryen: Putin was enraged, totally enraged. First of all, it's utterly stupid to call anybody by names like that, especially a national world leader, whether you like him or not. If you don't like him, get rid of him, you have ways to do that without making public statements. But to challenge him that way, to call him a war criminal, the Russians knew about Nazi war criminals. So, this kind of charge really is painful for Putin and angered him, and he's on a rant now about it. I think that's why he pulled back from the peace negotiations, at least for the moment, maybe he'll cool off in a few days. All the reports say that the Russian attacks are not going anywhere right now, they're all kind of stalled, so at some point he's going to have to be realistic, I hope.

Jerry Gordon: Well, we all hope it ends soon for the benefit of the Ukrainians and others.

Stephen Bryen: When are our political leaders going to grow up and behave like political leaders and take their responsibility seriously instead of this nonsense that we keep seeing from the US and from our NATO. It's just craziness. It's not the way you should be conducting business. Especially when you're dealing with a guy like that. That's a serious, dangerous guy. You have to take him seriously. When he says, "I'm going to invade Ukraine unless you make some deal with me", he wasn't kidding. He's said it for 15 years, he got tired of saying it.

Jerry Gordon: I don't know whether you saw the video of his orchestrated discussion with his inner advisors on this matter, especially his petulant attitude towards his foreign intelligence director. He pounded on the guy so badly, that eventually he stuttered and said, "Yes, I agree with you, we should recognize these rump republics." What he really meant was, "I agree with you that we should go in do something about Ukraine."

Stephen Bryen: Yes, it's all part of this sort of heavy angst

on the Russian side and anger, which is reflected in Putin.

Jerry Gordon: Was it paranoia?

Stephen Bryen: I don't think it's paranoia. I know that term is used very loosely these days. I don't think it's paranoia or maybe have some of the symptoms of paranoia. I think it's anger. There's a difference between paranoia and anger. Anger is anger.

Jerry Gordon: There's also a difference between anger and being mad.

Stephen Bryen: I don't think he's crazy. I think he's angry. That he feels that the Russian nation has been spurned by the West and treated in a backhanded colonialist way. He thinks that we're all a bunch of Nazis in our behavior. He's been fed all this information, some of it correct, I'm sure, some of it not. So that leads him to these conclusions. When you have leaders in the West who are unable to dialogue with him in any constructive way, and explain to him, well, with how we see it, and try to draw him into a real conversation and maybe it's a different story, but we haven't done that. Instead, we just call him and Russia names and we're paying the price. Unfortunately, the poor Ukrainian people are paying the price. And it's sad, it's a tragedy.

Jerry Gordon: On that powerful note, I want to thank you, Steve, for a remarkable discussion.

Stephen Bryen: Thank you, Jerry.

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